

From the Army Acquisition Executive

Operational Challenges Fuel Battlefield Ingenuity and Innovation

As the U.S. Army Theme states, "We are at war. Our individual and organizational approach to our duties and tasks must reflect the seriousness and sense of urgency characteristic of an Army at war. Our Soldiers and Nation deserve nothing less."

Every day America's Soldiers put mission, unit and country first. They are serving with distinction in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Balkans, Kuwait, the Sinai, and Korea — in 120 countries throughout the world. They face threats that change, quite literally, overnight, and their skill in meeting these challenges fills us all with pride. Let me give you an example.

When SFC James Hamilton's unit, the 762nd Transportation Co., delivered rations and water to troops in Iraq, it continuously received some type of small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire. So Hamilton and the Soldiers in his Army Reserve unit started to gather excess parts and materiel and applied them to their vehicles for improved survivability.

"The command received word of what we were doing and our commander gave us the green light to continue," said Hamilton. "We're getting ready to modify the design of the trailer with two Mark-19s (automatic grenade launchers) and two additional SAWs (Semiautomatic Assault Weapons)."

"Other vehicles, to include Humvees and Heavy Equipment Transporters, known as HETs, were also modified to mount M249 squad automatic weapons and M2 50-caliber machine guns. The operators of the vehicles have qualified with the new weapon platforms at a [firing] range and are fully mission capable for defending convoys," Hamilton concluded.

SGM Robert D. Casher, operations sergeant major for the 32nd Transportation Group remarked, "This is Soldier ingenuity at its best."

It is this "ingenuity," mixed with the rapid acquisition of new technology, that is saving Soldiers' lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. Interceptor Body Armor (16.4 pounds) has replaced the flak jacket (25.1 pounds). This lighter weight armor provides more upper body mobility to the Soldier and greater protection. I have talked with Soldiers who are alive today because they wore body armor. Our goal is to provide all Soldiers with this same protection.

The Army's Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) system is also saving lives. As a major component of the Blue Force Tracking (BFT) system deployed in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom* and *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, FBCB2 provides timely, relevant battle command information that enables informed decisions and facilitates integration of all forces. It has been hailed by Soldiers and commanders as an indispensable warfighting tool. A Marine



intelligence officer may have said it best, "Counterbattery radar picked up rounds going through the Marine sector. Prior to firing upon, I checked BFT and discovered that a 3rd Infantry Division unit had crossed into the Marine sector and was engaging the enemy."

The accomplishments of our brave men and women in uniform are truly remarkable. That is one reason why the Rapid Equipping Force (REF) works day and night to quickly find innovative ways to increase combat capabilities while making the tasks performed by our Soldiers safer and easier.

Created just 18 months ago, REF works directly with operational commanders to find promising technology solutions to identified operational requirements. Instead of bringing a "one-size-fits-all" mentality to an urgent operational requirement, REF representatives in Afghanistan, Kuwait and Iraq have fulfilled more than 50 equipping requirements either directly or in conjunction with existing project and program offices. Some requirements have been for items as sophisticated as the Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment, a 360-degree surveillance device suspended from an Aerostat balloon or attached to a tower, to something as low cost as commercial-off-the-shelf Personal Digital Assistants with programmed menus of mission-oriented phrases in local dialects.

In addition to the robot platforms that were first used to clear caves, compounds and bunkers in Afghanistan in 2002, technologies that REF brought to operational commanders in 2003 include a Soldier survivability electronic protection system that neutralizes improvised enemy explosive devices, state-of-the-art hand-held thermal viewers, countersniper devices, a remote video system that enables Soldiers to search for weapons in wells and other inaccessible areas and special shims that enable Soldiers searching for weapons in Iraq to nondestructively open padlocks. Capitalizing on its theater support team in country, REF delivered the last item to Soldiers to use on patrol within 24 hours of getting the requirement.

We must continue to work tirelessly to identify future force capabilities for the U.S. Army that should be put in the field now — not years from now. "We are at war. Our individual and organizational approach to our duties and tasks must reflect the seriousness and sense of urgency characteristic of an Army at war. Our Soldiers and Nation deserve nothing less." (U.S. Army Theme)

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